

BOOK REVIEW

S.M. WALTERS AND E. A. STOW. 2009. **Darwin's Mentor: John Stevens Henslow, 1796–1861**. (ISBN 978-0-521-11799-9, pbk.). Cambridge University Press, 100 Brook Hill Drive, West Nyack, New York, 10994-2133, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.cambridge.org, 1-845-353-7500). \$36.99, 338 pp. including 77 pp. of appendices, endnotes, bibliography, and index, 6 3/4" × 9 5/8".

When I picked up *Darwin's Mentor* I was looking forward to reading about a man who influenced/mentored Darwin, reading about their professional and personal relationships and learning more about each of these individuals. I was disappointed.

Just about the first thing I noticed about this book was actually something that had nothing to do with the content. The margins are so out of balance that it has the effect of making reading difficult. The inside margin is 15 mm and the outside margin is 40 mm! It has been suggested that this was deliberate, leaving room for making notes in the margin. Perhaps, if this was intended as a textbook, that could make some sense. For an ordinary reader, however, it is very distracting.

At the beginning of the book, the authors quote Charles Darwin from a letter written to Joseph Hooker, who perhaps was thinking of writing about Henslow. In his letter Darwin noted he could not "...help feeling doubtful, on the principle that a biography could not do him justice." Further noting, "I cannot help fearing his life might turn out flat. There can hardly be marked incidents to describe.—I sincerely hope that I take a wrong & gloomy view, but I cannot help fearing I would rather see no life than one that would interest very few." After reading the book, I rather felt Darwin was prescient in his evaluation.

It seems that Henslow was intelligent and well thought-of by his peers and his students. His most meaningful work may have been as Rector to Hitcham. He worked to improve the lives of the peasant folk in his parish to good effect and was, in the end, well regarded by them. However, the dearth of direct letters to and from Henslow or any sort of journal or items from local publications concerning him leaves this reader with little feeling for who the man was or how he influenced Darwin. In the end, even Darwin noted that Henslow's strong suit was his "ability...to draw conclusions based on...minute observations, but he didn't possess...much original genius."—*Kay Yount, Tarrant County Master Gardener, BRIT Volunteer, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.*